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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Lebanon, Syria/Venezuela,
Syria/Egypt, Syria/Cuba, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Palestinian
Territories (8/29)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers today led with reports of the visit to Lebanon by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Headlines featured Annan's meeting with Nabih Berri, Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, and their press conference in Beirut, in which Annan expressed full solidarity with the Lebanese people and demanded an end to the Israeli siege of Lebanon. Annan called for focusing all efforts to help the Lebanese people in facing their current difficult situation, and for implementation of UNSC Resolution 1701 by all concerned parties. Berri noted that talks with the UN SecGen were useful, adding "we focused on Israel's continuing siege on Lebanon, which violates UNSC Resolution 1701."

On Syrian-Venezuelan relations, papers reported the visit to Damascus by Mrs. Cilia Flores, Speaker of the Venezuelan National Legislative Council, who conferred with Dr. Mahmoud al-Abrash, Speaker of the Syrian People's Assembly. Talks touched on the current situation in the region, and means of boosting bilateral relations, particularly in the parliamentary domain. Mrs. Flores emphasized the depth of Syrian-Venezuelan historical relations, which have improved following the election of President Chavez, stressing her country's support for Syria's stances on Arab issues. She denounced continued pressures by the US Administration on Syria and Iran. Dr. Al-Abrash hailed Venezuela's positive stances on just causes, including its President's recall of his country's Ambassador to Israel to denounce the Israeli aggression against the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples.

On Syrian-Egyptian relations, papers reported the visit to Damascus of an Egyptian parliamentary delegation that conferred with Dr. Al-Abrash. The delegation emphasized the deep-rooted ties between Syria and Egypt. The delegation included members of the Egyptian parliament, representatives of non-governmental organizations, university teachers and others; all expressed full support for Syria's positions in the face of pressures and challenges.

On Syrian-Cuban relation, papers reported that Raul Castro, Acting Cuban President, received Syrian Minister of Information

Muhsen Bilal. The meeting was the Acting President's first with any foreign official. During the meeting, Minister Bilal conveyed President Asad's compliments to the Acting President and wished a quick recovery to President Fidel Castro, enabling him to resume his duties as President and to chair the Non-Aligned Summit scheduled for mid-September in Havana. The Acting President reiterated the importance of President Asad's participation in the Summit.
End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Lebanon reiterates the importance of full Israeli withdrawal, lifting Israeli siege on Lebanon, releasing Lebanese prisoners. UN SecGen Annan in Beirut, visiting the demolished southern suburb, discussing post-war era: Disarming Hizbollah is a Lebanese issue" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/29)

"Israeli PM Olmert acknowledges defeat in Lebanon. The Israeli government forms an investigation committee to contain the scandal. Ha'aretz: Israel is a useless American hound" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/29)

"Lebanese MP Jumblatt meets an Israeli MP in Paris" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/29)

"A Danish Parliament member calls for arrest of Israeli Foreign Minister Livni for war crimes in Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/29)

"Al-Abrash, Speaker of the People's Assembly, discusses enhancement of Parliamentary relations with Mrs. Flores, Speaker of the Venezuelan National Legislative Council. Mrs. Flores: We support Syria's positions on facing pressures" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/29)

"Cuba's Acting President Raul Castro receives Information Minister Bilal, describing Syria as the 'diamond and star' of the East, and stressing Cuba's desire for President Asad's participation in the NAM Summit in Havana" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/29)

"More than eight Palestinians killed in Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/29)

"Sudanese President al-Bashir rejects meeting President Bush's envoy" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/29)

"Iranian President Ahmadinejad: Our decision to possess nuclear technology is final" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/29)

"More than seven American soldiers killed in Iraq. Assaults in Baghdad and Mosul. Clashes in Diwanieh" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/29)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Who Violates Lebanon's Sovereignty?"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/29): "The Israeli Defense Minister has called on Syria to respect Lebanon's sovereignty and freedom....

"Look how the rulers of Tel Aviv falsify the facts on the ground. They stifle Lebanon with an unjust blockade from all sides and, with American support and UN cover, they bring international forces to protect their invading forces and cover their aggression and constant threats against Lebanon from inside its territory, and then they accuse Syria of not respecting Lebanon's sovereignty and freedom!

"Israel's alleged interest in Lebanon's sovereignty is consistent with the American-French "hypocrisy" about Lebanon's

sovereignty. But while Israel practices military aggression against Lebanon's sovereignty and freedom and then accuses others of threatening them, the United States and France have adopted the method of diplomatic interference in Lebanon's affairs, policies, and fraternal relations with Syria....

"Those who claim to care about Lebanon's sovereignty and freedom, including those who constitute a local extension for them and who draw strength from abroad, are the only ones who violate Lebanon's sovereignty and who do not respect Lebanon's freedom and independence. They pretend to care about Lebanon's sovereignty and freedom only to justify their flagrant interference in Lebanon and to advance their objective of abolishing Lebanon's identity and its Arab role, under the slogan of maintaining its sovereignty, freedom, and independence. As for Israel, the objective is to isolate Lebanon from Syria so that Israel can implement its plan of undermining the elements of Lebanon's steadfastness, especially its valiant resistance, to avenge the military, moral, and political defeat that the resistance inflicted on Israel and its army...."

"Suspicious Moves and Legitimate Questions"

Dr. Khalaf al-Jarrad, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishreen, wrote (8/29): "We wonder why Lebanon's February 14 group is not reacting to Israel's threats of new rounds of fighting in Lebanon and not asking its 'friends' in Washington and Paris to force Israel to lift the blockade of Lebanon? Does this mean

"This conclusion appears logical in light of the call by some February 14 leaders to disarm Hizbollah at a time when the Zionist army is still sitting heavily on part of the Lebanese land....

"But the more important question is: Why has the issue of the Lebanese-Syrian border become the main concern for France and the ministers and deputies who speak for the 14 February group? Is the aim, as they claim, to control smuggling and the entry of weapons into Lebanon? Or are there bigger and wider objectives? Have the mountainous, agricultural, and dirt tracks that the inhabitants of the Lebanese border towns use to buy their needs and transport their sick people to Homs hospitals in Syria become the source of danger in the eyes of the February 14 leaders? Or have they decided to remove the only lung that the Lebanese people use to breathe, close the gate that embraced hundreds of thousands of Lebanese citizens who were forced to leave their homes by the barbaric Zionist aggression, and punish the Lebanese people for their genuine and spontaneous national and pan-Arab choices?

"Many nationalist Lebanese forces have condemned and protested against this focus on the Syrian-Lebanese border and the calls for deploying international forces along it, describing these calls as 'shameful' and warning that they serve Israel's interests, harm Lebanon's sovereignty, and create tension in relations between Lebanon and Syria...."

"Why Don't Arabs Cherish Hizbollah's Victory?"

Dr. Buthaina Sha'ban, Minister of Expatriate Affairs, commented

in government-owned Tishreen (8/29): "We regret the attitude of some Arab officials and media toward Hizbollah's victory and their focus on Hizbollah's weapons while Israel is continuing its blockade of Lebanon and bringing to South Lebanon troops from countries known for their colonial past and for arming and fully supporting Israel to ensure Israel's security....

"While Israel continues to besiege Lebanon and kill Palestinians, Lebanese passenger planes are searched in Jordan and Arab troops guard an opening in the wall between Gaza and Egypt so that Palestinians will not use it to infiltrate their homeland and so that the grand Gaza prison will remain tightly closed.... While some Arabs are busy with Resolution 1701, which was adopted to save Israel from a miserable military defeat, they are saying nothing about the massacres that Israel perpetrated in Lebanon and they are doing nothing to promote Amnesty International's report on Israel's war crimes or to protest Washington's supply of cluster bombs to Israel.... While international media are busy analyzing the reasons behind Israel's defeat..., while Israel is setting up commissions to investigate why it lost the war, some Arabs are busy with attempts to dismantle the elements of their own power by disarming their resistance and implementing resolutions that were issued to subject their countries to the control of foreign powers.... While many foreigners express sympathy with Arabs, some Arabs are busy turning the victory into defeat and entrenching disdain for Arabs and their rights....

"What did Milosevic do more than Olmert, Peretz, and Halutz did, so that the latter three should escape punishment? The answer is: If Arabs supported themselves once, we would see the whole

"We wonder how Arabs could achieve a historic victory and yet some Arabs do not support their victory, and indeed participate in the effort to undermine it....

"Many in the world have started to realize the truth about Israel and to understand that it, along with the neoconservatives, is the spearhead of the escalating brutality in international relations. There is a real change in European public opinion in favor of Arab rights. Will Arabs stick to this historic transformation in order to achieve a just and comprehensive peace? Will they support it and serve as one of its important tools? Or will they remain involved in the myth of Israel's superiority, and in friendship with the United States, even after the Resistance defeated the myth and the United States joined Olmert in his savage war? Arabs broke free from the sense of weakness and humiliation when the Arab resistance filled Lebanon's soil with the blood of Arab pride. Let all of us adhere to this new dignified reality because we are all in one boat, whether we like it or not...."

"Why It Is Hated?"

Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (8/29): "Since the invasion of Afghanistan, the US Administration has done nothing other than anger Arabs and Muslims and other free nations in the world with its subservience to Israeli policy and the Jewish-American lobby....

"The US Administration has turned a deaf ear to all those who have given it advice at home and abroad. It has turned a blind eye to UN resolutions, to human rights conventions, and even to the principles of the American Constitution itself when it occupied Iraq. It has persisted in its support for Israel and has sponsored the aggression against Lebanon. It has aborted efforts of the Security Council and the international community to stop the aggression. It then obtained UNSC Resolution 1701 as dictated by Israel. All this generated hate for the US Administration and led to demonstrations in Europe and all other parts of the world, including the United States itself...."

Corbin